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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The International Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (IFS) is a coalition of national, regional and local non-profit social service organizations. Its membership consists of over 4,500 multipurpose community organizations operating in 44 countries. Its members' activities at the local level include community development projects, housing sponsorship, and social service programmes for children, youth, the ageing, the disabled, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups. At the national and international levels, IFS works in partnership not only with other non-governmental organizations but also with business and labour and the private sector to formulate social policy objectives and measures for the achievement of human rights. IFS is a multicultural organization which seeks to adapt the diverse needs and values of national and local cultures to the issues faced by individuals living in poverty in both rural and urban areas.

IFS wishes to congratulate the Secretariat and the members of the two expert workshops on social integration, participation and protection on the excellent reports that have been prepared for the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-sixth session. They provide a framework for discussion both by the governmental delegates and the

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representatives of non-governmental organizations. IFS is particularly concerned with the development of mechanisms which will facilitate the participation of individuals, as well as non-governmental organizations at all levels, in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

IFS agrees in general with the means and methods for participation described in the expert reports but calls attention to a deficiency in the suggestions. No adequate provision is made for Governments to be encouraged to include in their reports information offered by non-governmental organizations on the activities of their organizations in the planning, operating, monitoring and evaluation of programmes undertaken to implement the outcome of the World Summit. Such reporting would furnish an additional tool to advance the concept of tripartite cooperation of Governments (including local authorities), the private sector and non-governmental organizations. We hope the Commission on Social Development will take this observation into account and invite Governments to include comments from non-governmental organizations in their reports on implementation of the Summit's outcomes.

Mechanisms need to be put in place — and appropriately publicized — which enable individuals and families to make their views known, both at the planning stage and the operating stage. Examples of such mechanisms are regular public hearings at the community level dealing with social services, housing needs etc.; encouragement of the establishment of community associations; and transportation arrangements to facilitate access to governmental authorities. Such mechanisms do not necessarily have to be put into place by Governments alone — in other words, the mechanism itself can be tripartite. IFS believes its experience and its values could make a positive contribution to the development and operation of mechanisms designed to assist individuals and families to become aware of their rights and their responsibilities.

IFS fully supports the call for social impact assessments but notes that there is no consideration of the type of social indicators that would be used in making the assessments. The references to analyses are too general and where indicators are specifically mentioned, they are based on the use of statistical measurements. Non-governmental organizations such as IFS work with social indicators that include interviews with individual recipients of services and team-work analyses of community satisfaction. Such procedures permit the gathering of information and the development of social measurements that lead to more accurate and more equitable assessments. Examples of the use of such social indicators can be found in many current research studies and in the specifications for project evaluation as a condition of foundation grants. Another example of the use of social indicators is the assessment carried out by IFS and its member federations for membership accreditation. We urge the Commission for Social Development to encourage the use and refinement of comprehensive social indicators, based on the experience of non-governmental organizations such as IFS and its constituent members.

IFS appreciates that the expert reports recognize the danger of institutional or corporate interests taking precedence over the interests of the individuals and groups whom they are supposed to serve. IFS welcomes also the emphasis on the human rights approach as a "standard of legitimacy". At the same time IFS is dubious about the undifferentiated values framework which seems to give equal standing to respect for the right to life and the "value" of networks. Networks should be dealt with elsewhere. We hope that the Commission for Social Development will re-examine the values framework not only against the background of the international human rights instruments but also within the concept of the preservation of human dignity.